Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus
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I don't ever disagree with somebody like Admiral Katz. The only thing I will point out is that I'm old enough I was in the Navy before there were SWOs. (Laughter) Aviators had their wings, submariners had their dolphins and we had black shoes. (Laughter) And we were proud of it. In fact…and then I'll quit telling sea stories…but my last job on Little Rock, well, one of my duties, was I was put in charge of the closed circuit television station and our theme song was Mothers of Invention "Brown Shoes Don't Make It," which really endeared me to the helo det on the Little Rock. So, I want to thank you all, thank you all for having me. I'm glad to be back with my fellow surface warriors. I want to thank Doug Katz, Barry McCullough, members of this association. Thank you for what you do, thank you for making sure we stay apprised of the issues that are facing our surface fleet. We've got to have strong support from organizations like you if we are going to continue to develop the creative solutions that we've got to have as we face and ever-changing, ever more complex world.

We face, as you know, a national and international security environment that's full of complexities and uncertainties. Social disorder, political change, and advancing technology around the world continue to drive our foreign policy and global engagement. Our Navy and our Marine Corps are America's first line of defense, deployed worldwide. We're America's Away Team. Uniquely, what we provide, the Navy and Marine Corps, is presence, that constant presence ready for any challenge that may come over the horizon.

Now, I talk about presence a lot, but what does it really mean?

First, it means that we deploy pretty much the same in times of war and in times of peace. In order to provide that presence that we need, today we have more than 100 ships forward deployed and more than 30,000 Marines deployed around the world. They're doing this myriad of missions, from air strikes against ISIL, to fighting Ebola, to exercising with our partners and our friends to protect freedom of navigation in the Pacific.

As we have drawn down from two land wars our sister services talk about "re-set" and coming home. Well there are no permanent homecomings for Sailors and Marines. For 239 years, we've deployed continually to keep America's adversaries far from our own shores. We deploy not only to fight and win our nation's wars, but also to act as a powerful deterrent to potential adversaries.

Second, presence means we are where it matters, when it matters. Because we are forward deployed, we're usually there when a crisis begins to develop. Coming from the sea, we get anyplace quicker, we can stay as long as we need to, we bring everything we need and we don't have to ask anybody's permission.

Those are pretty significant attributes when you think about some of the distances involved and some of the time needed to react. Being there – providing that presence – gives our nation's leaders an array of options, and those options range from the humanitarian assistance calls we get on a very regular basis, including things like Japan, the Philippines, and Haiti, to delivering the first strikes against ISIL off the deck of the USS GEORGE H.W. BUSH.

And that last one is a great example. When the President decided we would strike ISIL, the Bush was in the Northern Arabian Sea, doing combat air over Afghanistan. Within 30 hours, she was in the Northern Arabian Gulf, on station, ready to launch strikes. She was our only option for 54 days. 54 days. It wasn't because we didn't have any other assets in the region. It was because we couldn't get permission to take off in order to do those strikes. We didn't have to ask anybody whether we could take off from the Bush. I think that's one example of just how vital the Navy and Marine Corps are to our national security, and it goes back through history.

From the victories over the British frigates 200 years ago, through Manila Bay, the Battle of the Atlantic in World War I, the vast reaches of the Pacific in World War II. But it isn't only our physical security, as important as that is, we defend.

It is also our economic well-being. The Navy and Marine Corps contribute to our security in a way that is felt by every single American. On the shelves of stores across this country, there are "just in time" deliveries. So, what we do has a direct impact on the availability of goods and on the prices. I can make a pretty good argument, and do a lot, that the United States Navy has been the primary reason for the success of the international economic system by protecting the sea lanes and keeping those sea lanes open for everybody involved in peaceful commerce.

And the other thing I'm talking about is jobs. In the United States over 40 million people have jobs directly tied to international seaborne trade - more than one in four working Americans. That's because we live in such an age of globalization and world trade. 90-percent of all commerce goes by sea, 95-percent of all our telecommunications and data go under the sea. Our commercial, our economic success is tied to the sea in so many ways and to the rest of the world.

It isn't just people who work in ports or on ships. From farming to fashion, from electronics to energy, manufacturing of all kinds are dependent on the imports and the exports over the world's oceans.

So, the security that we provide is tied directly to main streets all across this country. Leading economists at great universities have told us about the link between, and have proved the link between, the forward presence of the Navy and Marine Corps and the stability of this globalized economy.

While we benefit economically, we also benefit from the way that some of this shared economic success helps limit conflict and potential wars. When you look around the world and see unrest and violence, a lot of times you also find high unemployment, stagnant economies, and financial struggles. By helping to secure the world's oceans, protect free trade, and respond to crises early to prevent escalation, the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps are vital to the American people, to our security.

Providing that presence falls on the surface fleet. The foundation of our Navy, and this is sort of a truism, but you have to explain it from time to time, the foundation of our Navy is ships. That's what we are, that's why we're the Navy. We have to have the right sized fleet to do what we need to do.

Now, I've lost track of the number of times people have come up to me and explained to me that our fleet is shrinking. Now, you all have heard these numbers before but I'm going to do it again until nobody comes up and says the fleet is shrinking.

On September 11, 2001, the U.S. Navy had 316 ships. By 2008, after one of the great military buildups in our nation's history, our fleet was down to 278 ships. In the five years before I came into this office, the U.S. Navy put 27 ships under contract. That was not enough to halt the decline of the size of the fleet and it was also not enough to protect our industrial base.

In the first five years I've been in office, we have put under contract 70 ships with a smaller top line for Navy. In 2014 we launched 9 ships and by the end of the decade our fleet is going to be back over 300 ships.

When you say that, the next criticism you get is, "that's great, but you've done it at the cost of aviation." Wrong.

The first five years I've been Secretary we've bought 1,300 naval aircraft. That is 40% more than were bought the five years before. We're not neglecting ships or planes.

Even as we deal with possible impacts of the sequester, now is not the time to give up on the progress we've made in our shipbuilding. I don't believe you ought to pay for one Navy ship with another Navy ship. Shipbuilding takes a long time, it has long lead times. It takes a lot of time to get a ship from drawings to commissioning. It is the least reversible thing we do. If you miss a year, if you cancel a ship, you can't get it back because our industrial base can't handle it, twice, what we had, if we miss a year and we try to push it into the next year, and we have to have those gray hulls on the horizon. So we're building a balanced fleet.

The first example is a bad example for this audience, but two Virginia Class attack submarines. Now, I know what submariners call us – targets – but we've got to command the undersea as well as the surface. We're building two DDGs a year, we commissioned a big-deck amphib in October and another one is under construction and Congress, in the 2015 budget, has put in money for an additional LPD. We're building other support ships like Mobile Landing Platforms and Afloat Forward Staging Bases. All of these programs are on schedule and either on or under budget.

We also have two carriers under construction, CVN-78 and CVN-79. Now, you've heard, as I have, about the costs of this carrier program. It is pretty clear that CVN-78, the Ford, is a prime example of how not to build a ship. We started designing it while we were building it. Too much technology that was not mature, not proven, was trying to be pushed into this first ship and it's a cost-plus contract. But since I've come into this office, we've started some very strict oversight and we're driving down the cost of CVN-78 and, perhaps more importantly, CVN-79, taking the lessons learned from 78 and applying them to 79, the Kennedy. At this point, and I believe going forward, I believe that very strongly, both ships are under and will remain under Congressional cost caps, so we have made some real progress there.

And finally, I want to talk to you about our small surface combatants. Today in the shipyard in Marinette, Wisconsin, we've got five Freedom Class ships currently under construction, including Admiral, the next USS Little Rock. It's an amazing thing to be able to name Navy ships. In Mobile, alongside the high-speed vessels that are in serial production, we have five Independence Class ships under construction. Four are in the fleet and in 2015 the yards are going to deliver four more.

Now, there have also been a lot of stories about LCS and usually the facts are at least a couple of years, and usually more than that, the facts cited are usually three or four years behind the reality. They're just based on bad data. Because we are in serial production on both classes of ship, the costs keep coming down and we are launching on schedule. When this program started, it did have some problems. But they've been turned around and this program, in a lot of ways, is an acquisition success story and a model program and they are coming in well under, well under the Congressional cost cap.

These ships are going to be critical to our fleet moving forward. We have a demonstrated need for 52 of them. Last week we saw the final deployment of USS Kauffman, our last Perry Class frigate. For decades the Perry Class has done an outstanding job and been a central part of our work with our partners in theater security missions and providing lower cost, small footprint, approaches to operations. These roles are going to be filled by the Freedom and Independence Class ships. Like every ship we're introducing, these new ships are far more capable than the ones they're replacing. They are operating unmanned systems, they've got a wealth of new and innovative technology, and they are going to be forward deployed a whole lot more.

As Kauffman leaves on her last voyage, USS Fort Worth is in Singapore on her first voyage. She's testing the lessons that we learned from Freedom's deployment to Singapore the last two years - the upgrade we've made to both the hardware and the operating concepts that we based on those lessons. Looking at Freedom's experience we've made 400 individual changes to Fort Worth before she deployed.

This class of ship, and both variants of it are equally at home in the blue water and brown. Fort Worth is tailor made for the broad expanses of the Pacific, which she crossed to get to Singapore, using far less fuel than had been anticipated, but flexible and agile enough to work in the littorals and coastal waters of Southeast Asia. She's going to be in Singapore for 16 months and we're going to rotate three crews in. The ship stays where it is; the crews come and join the ship. Immediately after arriving in Singapore she went back to sea and is taking part in the search operations for the Air Asia flight. These ships aren't a test case anymore; they are a normal part of our Fleet.

Based on the results of the Small Surface Combatant Task Force, we're improving both variants, making them more lethal, making them more survivable, ensuring that they are are multi-mission. By improving these, we're also doing the constant incremental improvements that we do on every ship class. Even with the additional expense of putting in this increased lethality, increased survivability, these ships are still going to come in under the cost cap that was set for them before they had these improvements.

Some of the things we've put in include a new over the horizon surface-to-surface missile, upgraded and improved combat systems, a dedicated towed array sonar and we're hardening certain parts of the ship to make it more survivable. Because of the efficiency of the yards and the way we have been able to reduce costs, this ship is still going to be the most affordable in our arsenal.

Now I've talked and Admiral Katz talked about my ship, the Little Rock. We had a thousand people on that ship. She was an old ship. She was built during World War II and after the war

she was laid up, put in mothballs. As the Cold War heated up in the '50s, she was pulled out and put through a refit that lasted three years. Weapons taken out and new ones put on, new sensors added, the entire back of the super-structure was taken out and replaced – in about as ugly a configuration as you can imagine. The biggest change was the addition of the then revolutionary new weapon, the TALOS guided missile. Little Rock went through that one big conversion and several smaller ones and served until past the middle of the '70s.

The history of that ship is one of the hallmarks of the constant drive of the naval profession and the surface community for improved adaptation. The Navy tore that ship apart, inside-out, and rebuilt it to make it a viable platform for a new age, and we've done that, over and over again. From the introduction of USS Monitor to the first steam powered, armored ships during the Civil War, to the gunnery revolution led by some junior officers during the last century, to the Marine Corps development of amphibious warfare between the two World Wars, our Sailors and our Marines have always looked to be on the cutting edge.

I think we need to embrace a couple things. One is the tradition of the Navy, a long tradition, and it's a tradition of innovation and developing new ideas. When Little Rock was put into the shipyard and rebuilt as a new kind of cruiser, she was re-designated. She started out as a CL, Light Cruiser, because that's what the nation needed at the end of World War II. Once she was refitted and re-commissioned she was changed to CLG, Light Guided Missile Cruiser. This change connected that new and innovative weapon system, with the long naval history and tradition.

We've a little bit gotten away from that today. We started naming ships, or designating ships, with some interesting acronyms that seem to have come out of the Pentagon instead of our naval traditions. I'm thinking about things like AFSB, MLP, JHSV, and of course LCS. It's not an L class ship. I hear L, I think amphib. Everybody else does. I hear littoral and, I have to tell you, I spend a good bit of my time explaining what a littoral is. So I think it's time we reconnect our tradition of innovation and creative thinking with what we're doing today.

I've talked with CNO and Assistant Secretary for Acquisition Sean Stackley, we got input from this community and so we are going to start with the LCS. One of the requirements that the Small Surface Combatant Task Force had was to have a ship with frigate-like capabilities. It's a frigate; we're going to call it one.

We're going to change the hull designation from LCS to FF forward for LCS. It is going to be the same ship, the same program of record, just with an appropriate and traditional name. In coming weeks we will announce new hull designations for the other types of ships that I have mentioned. As a former CNO, George Anderson once said, "The Navy has both a tradition and a future--and we look with pride and confidence in both directions."

For 239 years our Navy and Marine Corps have been agile, innovative and adaptable. Forward deployed, they remain the most responsive option to defend the United States. We have to make sure, even through these uncertain times, that it remains so.

From the Navy, Semper Fortis: Always Courageous.
From the Marines, Semper Fidelis: Always Faithful.